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Marketing & Business Strategy: A Relationship Opportunity in Curricula

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ABSTRACT

Business schools and administration curriculum delivery often fail to recognize and leverage the relationship between Marketing Strategy and overall Business Strategy courses regarding course overlap/merger, course scheduling, and/or instruction. Since it is becoming increasingly difficult to find and realize curriculum improvements that well engage students in the wake of scheduling conflicts and enrollment/matriculation challenges, Pfeiffer MHA is, and urges other academic programs to consider as well, embracing the standardization required to leverage these two course subjects in order to realize the academic synergy between them for our students.

INTRODUCTION

While the relationship between Marketing Strategy and overall Business Strategy may be considered obvious and straightforward, it is ironic how many business and administration schools and or programs fail to recognize and embrace this relationship relative to their curriculum models and course delivery. Marketing is invariably one of several “key” strategic functions in almost every industry and is recognized as such by virtue of its obvious prominence in business and in academic core course offerings; it has a logical, natural, and structural relationship with overall Business Strategy courses. However, in the face of this accepted and recognized relationship, business schools and administration curriculums often fail to recognize and leverage this relationship in curriculum delivery regarding course overlap/merger, course scheduling, and/or instruction. The purposes of this theory paper is to review, articulate, and emphasize the finer points of this basic relationship and to propose curriculum models and options that better leverage its delivery.

“Strategic”, “Critical”, “Core” and/or “Key” Functions

Before embarking on reviewing the critical nature of Marketing as a function, the semantics of using or defining “strategic”, “critical”, and/or “key” as qualifiers in this regard and paper must be addressed. In theory, every function in an organization is “strategic” or should be; otherwise

why else would it exist or be delineated and segmented for focus and/or operational synergy and/or specialization as a function or department in the first place? However, using this term for any and every organizational department and/or function would render them collectively binary and/or perhaps arbitrarily and discretely “strategic” versus “non-strategic”, with little continuous qualification possible. However, invariably in the business strategy for any organization and/or industry there tend to be certain functions that are more (versus less) important regarding being competitive in the industry and marketplace. So for the purpose of this paper we will refer to these relatively more important functions as strategic, critical, core, and/or key functions. Table 1 reflects this in an intuitive and empirical typology performed by the author of core, key, critical, and/or strategic functions by industry.

Identifying and Confirming Marketing and Other Key Strategic Functions

While every functional department and manager/administrator should ideally prepare a strategic plan for their function/department, the CEO and even Executive Staff’s ability to know and recognize their org’s most critical functions when formulating and executing an overall strategic business plan is very important. Only by knowing which functions are truly critical can overall strategies be properly formulated, prioritized, resourced, and implemented. Organizations lacking the executive time, focus, and/or ability to discern and delineate key functions often inadvertently and ultimately find themselves in a “shotgun” strategy and mode of operation where any and every function is simultaneously and equally important and prioritized. So grasping and applying this concept of key or strategic functions in overall strategic business planning is critical. Perhaps the best way to convey the concept of key or critically strategic functions is with a visual; Table 1’s typology was completed by the author from intuition, logic, and empirical research and experience as an SBU manager and academician, and basically attempts to reflect, for various industries, which functions likely are, or tend to be, those most critical in terms of overall business strategy formulation and execution.

Table 1
Core/ Critical/ Key/Strategic Functions by Industry

	<i>Manufacturing</i>	<i>Banking</i>	<i>Electronics</i>	<i>Telecomm.</i>	<i>HealthCare</i>
<i>Core, Key, Strategic, and/or Critical Functions</i>	Operations	Finance	Rsrch. & Dev.	Operations	Clinical Opns.
	Rsrch. & Dev.	Operations/IT	<i>Marketing</i>	<i>Marketing</i>	IT/Systems
	<i>Marketing</i>	<i>Marketing</i>	Recruitment	Tech/R&D	<i>Marketing</i>

Not surprisingly, Marketing invariably emerges from this exercise as the most prevalent strategic function within the majority of industries and organizations. From Table 1 Marketing's prominent role and place is visually evident; Marketing is almost always one of several critical functions in every industry's business strategy and is probably the most common and prevalent strategic function shared by the industries. Marketing is found to be in the top three strategic 100% of the time and in the top two 40% of the time, and is joined by Operations, IT/Systems, R&D, and finance as other key strategic functions. This functional prominence is visually reflected in Marketing's relative central position under the Business Strategy Umbrella (Figure 1). Marketing's prominence as a function is also well noted and recognized in academia, where almost every business and administration curriculum contain both Marketing and (Business) Strategy as core courses.

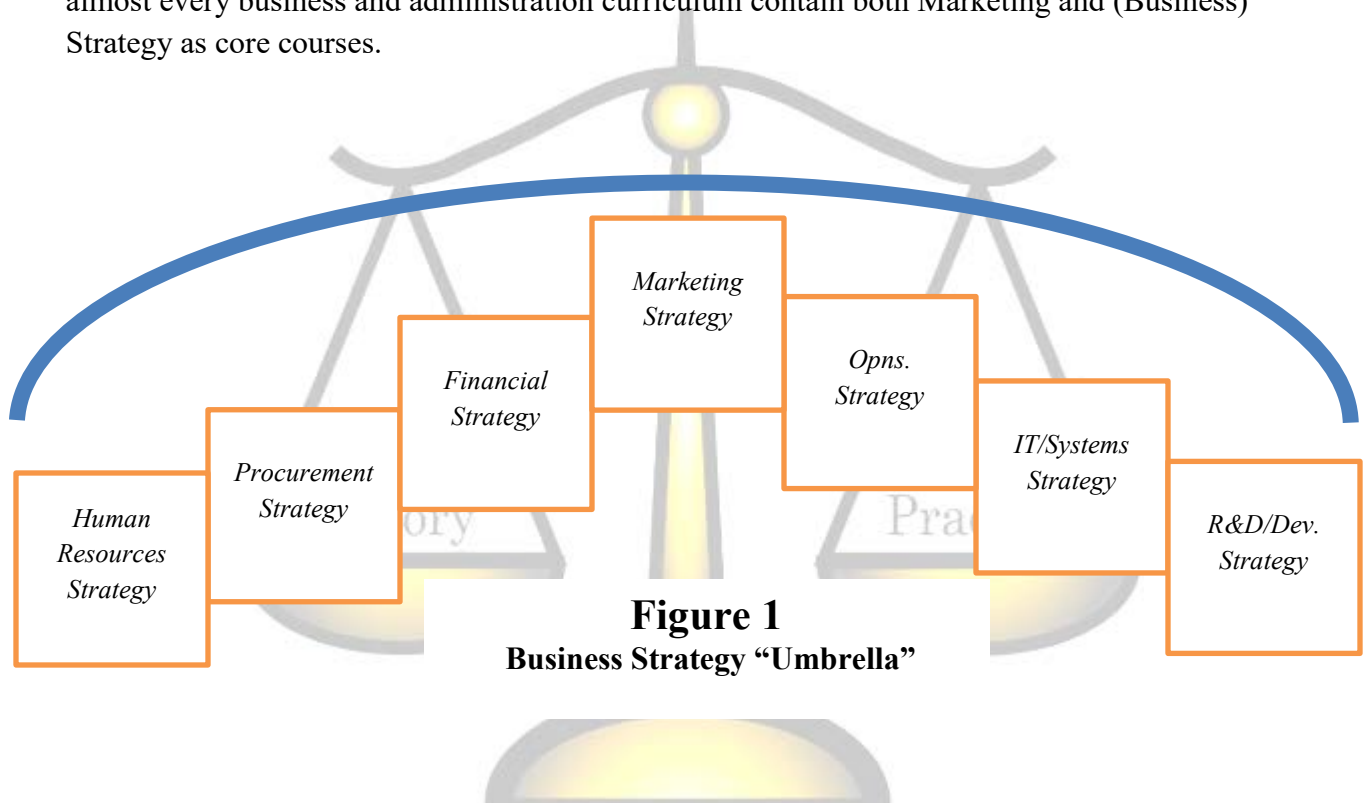


Figure 1
Business Strategy “Umbrella”

Marketing's Unique Relationship with Business Strategy

While curriculums well recognize Marketing's importance as a function, administrators often do not well understand or recognize is the synergistic relationship between Business Strategy and Marketing Strategy. While Finance, IT, HR, and Operations courses tend to be stand-alone, non-strategic, concept courses, Marketing is the only functional course that is usually a “strategy” course; it is this connection to and commonality with Business Strategy that provides a common ground for course overlap and leverage that usually does not exist or is not as prevalent and/or opportunistic for other functional courses. The amount of basic content and format overlap and correlation between Marketing and Business Strategy is considerable; it is therefore

understandable that, and not unusual for: a) Professors to be credentialed to teach both Marketing Strategy and Business Strategy; b) the models and structure of these courses to be very similar and for the first section of these models to begin with an identical situational purview; c) the potential projects for these courses to be compatible and/or identical; d) the authors of the texts to have both marketing and strategic backgrounds

Optimizing Continuity and Efficiency in Curriculum Delivery

Marketing's functional prominence in industry and Business Strategy is not really a neither surprise nor "new news" to practitioners or academics; Marketing departments, the 4-Ps, and strong Marketing models and curriculums have existed since the late 1950s and the days of "(M)ad Men". What IS surprising however is that, despite the length of time that Marketing has reigned as perhaps the most prominent "child" or function under the Business Strategy Umbrella (Figure 1), academic administrators have repeatedly failed to well-reflect and/or leverage this in their curriculum deliveries regarding text selection, course scheduling, course numbering and sequencing, course overlap and/or merger, Professor assignment, and student projects.

While scheduling courses often requires flexibility in Professor assignment, these two courses are too often scheduled inadvertently and by default rather than by design or intent; the opportunity to better leverage the delivery of these courses for Professors and students is therefore either a low(er) priority and/or it is simple not well understood or recognized by scheduling Chairs, Directors, Deans, and/or Administrators. So ironically, in an academic world where business deans and administrators worry constantly about delivery effectiveness, student engagement, student satisfaction, and professor and/or course evaluation scores, they are missing an opportunity to better schedule, staff, and segue two core courses that are readily available for their synergistic relationship to be leveraged for both students and faculty.

Table 2
Business Strategy & Marketing Strategy Course Continuity

	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Worst Case</i>	<i>Better Case(s)</i>	<i>Best Case</i>
<i>Course numbering & sequencing</i>	Continuity & efficiency are promoted & leveraged	Not sequential; treated as if "stand alone"	<i>The two are offered back-to-back or in close sequence</i>	The two are merged or continue across a semester/quarter
<i>Professor assignment</i>	Continuity & efficiency are promoted & leveraged	Assigned totally independently	<i>The same Professor is assigned if possible</i>	The same Professor must be assigned

<i>Text selection</i>	Continuity & efficiency are promoted & leveraged	Selected totally independently	<i>Compatible texts are selected consciously</i>	A single merged text is used in both courses
<i>Syllabi</i>	Continuity & efficiency are promoted & leveraged	Created totally independently	<i>Syllabi are cross-referenced in creation</i>	Syllabi are created by same Professor or one syllabi for a merged course
<i>Course overlap &/or merger</i>	Continuity & efficiency are promoted & leveraged	Courses are structured totally independently	<i>Some overlap is recognized and considered</i>	The two courses are merged into one continuous course
<i>Project overlap & continuity</i>	Continuity & efficiency are promoted & leveraged	The two courses have different projects	<i>The project from Marketing is allowed and/or encouraged for use in Strategy</i>	The project from Marketing must be the same one and is perpetuated in Strategy

Note: Grey italics indicates level of synergy attained thus far in Pfeiffer's MHA Program

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Ideally these two courses provide an optimal opportunity for single-course consolidation and/or for back-to-back scheduling with student project and/or professor continuity and leverage at the minimum. However, clearly recognizing the potential synergy between Marketing and Business strategy and then practically realizing it are two different things – the academic world has constraints and limitations. While the nature of this article and its emphasis indicate that we at Pfeiffer well-recognize this relationship, the highlighting in Table 2 reminds us that there are practical limitations to attaining the ideal in its far right column. These limitations include scheduling conflicts, Professors' styles, preferences, and perspectives of delivery, and the balance in delivery between perfectly standardized courses versus academic freedom and latitude. However, since it is becoming increasingly difficult to find and realize curriculum improvements that well engage students in the wake of scheduling conflicts and enrollment/matriculation challenges, Pfeiffer MHA is, and urges other academic programs to consider as well, embracing the standardization required to leverage these two course subjects in order to continue to realize the academic synergy between them for our students.

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